

Capital Campaigns Can Be Fun!

Capital campaigns need not be a necessary evil – or the big administrative nightmare – that most people believe them to be. In fact, a well-organized campaign plan will prevent mistakes from being made and result in a very successful effort for your institution. During a capital campaign, you will see increased spirit among trustees, donors, and beneficiaries. Most importantly, your organization will solidify itself further, as being worthy of public and private support.

Months and months of planning are necessary for a successful campaign. However, it can be done, and it can be fun. Before actual campaign planning begins, ensure the following:

- **Stability in key staff positions.** A revolving door will not help a campaign effort.
- **Consistent growth in your annual fund over the past several years.** You should be able to raise an amount five to ten times greater in a campaign than you do annually.
- **Funds are available to retain a consultant.** A consultant offers outside expertise that can help avoid costly errors and PR nightmares. You should spend a great deal of time researching firms and selecting the one right for you.

The next step would be approval from your board to begin the market research with a feasibility study. This type of information is well worth the price and should involve interviews of top donors and/or prospects that would likely support your fundraising effort. These interviews are a cultivation tool for identifying potential financial and volunteer support.

Once you have your feasibility study report – and all lights are green – you must:

1. Ensure Board members attend meetings regularly and are enthusiastic about a campaign effort. They also must put their money where their mouth is! A good rule of thumb is that the Board contributes at least 10% - 30% of your goal.
2. Hold a planning retreat (one or more full days) consisting of Board members, key volunteers and staff to get the creative juices flowing and to make sure that everyone is playing on the same team. Remember that those who help to design and implement the plan will support it with their time and money.
3. Prepare job descriptions for your committee chairmen and key volunteers. Start working on this immediately. Do not surprise your volunteers later with tasks they were not expecting.
4. Every successful campaign employs a case statement that embodies a sense of urgency in the cause, and motivates the prospect to help with an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Develop your case for support so as to appeal to a wide audience. The funding project should be something with which donors would enjoy associating. Your case statement gives all the

details on paper about your institution. You may not be there to answer questions for the reader, so it must have personality! Ensure that the feelings it invokes after reading it are positive.

Describing your organization's history and some of the latest statistics is appropriate, but do not make that the focus of the statement. Instead, tell the reader why it is necessary for the organization to raise funds. Also, remember to tell the reader how they can help, how their gifts can be structured, and how their funds will be expended or endowed.

Assign the writing of the statement to one individual. Committee members can proof and revise later, but should not take the initial shot at writing it. Remember that individuals make things happen, and committees have the potential of adding bureaucracy.

5. Identify the major gift prospects you feel can reasonably provide a majority of your campaign goal. A good feasibility study should provide you with insight into your potential major donors. Major gift prospect identification should be an ongoing, never-ending process in your role as a development professional.
6. Know how much cash you need immediately. Can you accept planned gifts and still be able to complete your building project or endowment building campaign? Certain donors may be willing to do something large, but only through a planned gift, and thus your institution may not get the cash when it needs it. Consider planned giving options that provide cash to the organization now and tax benefits to the donor, such as charitable gift annuities and charitable lead trusts.
7. Incorporate your annual fund solicitations into your capital campaign effort. You must not stop the solicitation of annual gifts because you are raising capital funds. In fact, a well-planned campaign should result in more monies raised for the annual fund.
8. Identify all naming opportunities. Also, this list should always be available even when there is no campaign. Remember that a potential donor may not wait for a capital campaign to make a substantial gift. Be ready for their generosity.
9. Recruit a chairman willing to work and make the campaign a success. If you have a widely-recognized chairman, but one who is not willing to do the work, you need a strong volunteer support team to serve on the campaign steering committee.
10. Make sure you have all the computer hardware and software necessary to handle the campaign. Also, you need properly trained staff to make all the bells and whistles work to produce reports, analyze data, track prospects, handle accounting, etc.
11. Spend an inordinate amount of time on designing and implementing an acknowledgement program. You can never thank a donor enough. Letters from your Board Chair, Campaign Chair, President, key staff members, and even some of your program beneficiaries are extremely important.

- 12.** Hold extensive screening meetings with volunteers and review your lists of prospects. Peers of a prospect are able to give honest, informed opinions about their ability and willingness to contribute. Peers may know about family, work, or personal situations that will affect support of your campaign effort. Assign each prospect a rating code that signifies at what level of support you are seeking. This rating code should be agreed upon by at least 2 - 3 volunteers in the screening meeting.
- 13.** Spend the time necessary for proper training of staff and volunteers. Everyone needs to know the important details of the campaign and especially the proper techniques for soliciting prospects.
- 14.** Regarding expenses, spend what you have to, but do not be too cheap. Most donors have egos and want to be treated to nice kickoff celebrations or recognition functions.
- 15.** By all means, the solicitors should be solicited first. This begins with the Campaign Chairman making his/her commitment and then asking all the other trustees to follow suit. Solicitations are most effective if the solicitors contribute in the same dollar range in which they are asking their peers to contribute.
- 16.** Solicit support from your employees and those from within. Often this is what encourages outside foundations and individuals to support your cause. Some foundations even require one hundred percent board participation before they will consider making a grant. Remember the old fundraising adage: "from the top down and inside out."
- 17.** Beware of over-enthusiastic volunteers wanting to solicit 25 people. Better to have them solicit 5 people well rather than 25 people poorly. Proper solicitation takes time and all of us are busy. Do not overwhelm volunteers with time commitments.
- 18.** Announce the campaign to the public only when you have at least 50% - 60% of the goal committed. It helps build momentum when you announce a \$50 million campaign, and you already have \$25 million in commitments. Doing this also allows you to adjust the campaign goal up or down depending upon the initial seed money pledged.
- 19.** Have an administrative plan ready to implement after your goal is surpassed. The campaign does not end once the goal is reached. In fact, sometimes it takes years to continue collecting and acknowledging pledge payments.

After accomplishing the above tasks, you are encouraged to take a long lunch or leave the office early for the day. You have done most of the hard work toward a successful campaign. Proper planning ensures that everyone is on the same team doing their part to raise the necessary funds. Good luck and happy fundraising!